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ABSTRACT

The following statements summarize the author's analysis of changing attitudes to work and life styles in Western society: (1) a permissive society has fostered a change in authority roles; (2) general mistrust toward big busines is nc longer limited to the public at large; (3) employees, supervisors, and managers all dislike and fear change; (4) changing attitudes toward work reflect the values of a post-religious society which no longer views work as punishment with a reward in the after life; (5) youth reflect much less commitment to the work ethic and greater cynicism in many areas; (6) older workers do not look retrospectively upon their careers with a real sense of achievement; (7) significant attitude changes in Japan reveal that the American young are not a peculiar breed and that for the first time work must compete with other personal values; (8) the era of rising entitlements has created a feeling that jobs, income, and a rising standard of life are no longer privileges, but a secured right; (9) changing attitudes toward work, combined with the revolution in social values, have opened a new interest in improving the quality of working life as the long term answer to a renewed motivation to work; and (10) changes in American moral and social values have been rapid and penetrating over the past decade but large organizations have been slow to change. (BM)

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CHANGING ATTITUDES TO WORK AND LIFE STYLES

Jerome M. Rosow*

Introduction

It is presumptuous to seek to explain fully and rationalize the diverse changing attitudes of Americans to work and life styles. Given the limits of time and knowledge, I shall address a selected number of areas in an effort to shed a bit of light on what seems to be going on around us. The discussion will consider the following:

I. Challenge to Authority

II. Decline in Confidence in Institutions

III. Changing Attitudes Toward Work

- A. Post Religious Society
- B. Less Dedication to Work
- C. Participation in Decisions
- D. Older Workers
- E. Comparison with Japan
- F. The Permissive, Affluent Society
- G. Quality of Working Life

IV. Work and the Family

- A. Divorce
- B. One-Parent Families
- C. Multiple Worker Families
- D. Work Place Implications

V. Conclusions

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I. Challenge to Authority

During the 1960s, the United States and other Western societies experienced a so-called youth counter-culture movement. Many of the traditionally radical attitudes of youth were intensified by a concern over the environment and a revulsion against war. The revolution in social values has continued, so that the ideas originally advanced by a comparatively small number of students are now embraced by millions of people in mainstream America.

As a by-product of these fundamental changes, American young people have changed their attitude toward authority. In 1969 almost 70% of the young accepted authority with few reservations. Now, a majority say that they need not take orders from a supervisor at work if they disagree with the orders. The permissive society in the West has fostered a change in authority roles. We have seen this change in the schools, where the young openly disagree with and challenge their teachers. In fact, during 1976 approximately 65,000 teachers were physically attacked in their classrooms. We have witnessed changes in the family, where the traditional authority figures have adopted more open relationships with their children in order to achieve consent and stability. These more permissive values have carried over into marriage; the husband-wife relationship is undergoing a transformation. Who is the boss in your family?

It is to be expected that these changes in authority relationships would spread to the workplace. But even as younger, more educated workers resent authoritarianism, they are not opposed to the proper exercise of authority. This distinction is quite important. They respect authority properly exercised with restraint and with rationality, but reject author-

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ity which is abusive or arbitrary. This poses a challenge for large bureaucratic organizations to rationalize their work procedures and learn the art of managing conflict with consent.

II. Decline of Confidence in Institutions

In the United States, the decline in respect for authority is related to a growing mistrust of institutions. Business, government, labor, the church and the military have all fallen in the general public's esteem. This mistrustful feeling is most pronounced with regard to the Presidency and big business, the two American institutions that are believed to possess the greatest power in the country. Big business has seen a rise from 30% mistrust of corporations in 1968 to 70% by 1975. In fact, by 1975, nine out of ten United States citizens expressed a general mistrust of "those in power," covering business, government and most national institutions. Some of this same cynicism is reflected in Western European countries.

As recently as the mid-1960s, American big business enjoyed a reputation for unmatched industrial know-how and technological achievement. This image of relative infallibility was badly shaken by the financial failures of several multi-billion dollar corporations. (cite: Wreck of the Penn Central). Business suffered post-Watergate shocks when over 400 companies were cited for illegal political contributions. In addition, the general mistrust toward big business is no longer limited to the public at large, but also applies to managerial employees. In one recent study, for example, it was found that more than two-thirds of management within large organizations do not believe or support the advertising programs of their own companies!

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When a cherished institution falls from grace; when directors are dismissed or charged with civil suits and found guilty; when the ethics of the corporation are brought into question, what happens to attitudes and loyalties of its own members? Employees are the first line of defense. Yet instead of acting in this capacity, many feel that they are the last to know.

In contemporary terms of "corporate social responsibility," the private corporation recognizes that in addition to its basic economic role, it must be responsive to consumers, to the environment, and to its own employees. Insofar as any of these have been badly neglected or subordinated to economic pressures and profit goals, they weaken public support for business as an institution and especially for companies which have violated the moral code.

At a time that institutions are struggling to regain public support and sustain confidence, they have a new opportunity. Employees are basically social beings with a strong gregarious need. People are drawn to work by both economic and social needs. Employees identify with the company, they have a natural desire to belong and to be a part of the work group, the department and the large organization. Their loyalties are reinforced by job security needs and strong social needs.

The United States Census estimates that 32% of American workers are singles: (up from 27% in 1950), divorced, separated, widowed or never married. Loneliness is becoming one of the most characteristic problems faced by a growing proportion of the labor force. The weakening of the American family reinforces this trend.

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The decline of the family, the church and the small community has increased the importance of the workplace for providing social support. The workplace can provide a sense of involvement with other people in a common enterprise and in general for making life more meaningful.

III. Changing Attitudes Toward Work

A. The Post Religious Society

The work ethic had its origins in the beginning of Western civilization. The early Greeks regarded work as a curse. It suggested drudgery, heavy-heartedness and exhaustion. For the Hebrews it was regarded as an atonement for the original sin. The early Christians followed this concept - work was considered as an act of expiation. They also looked to work as a means of spreading charity and to share with the needy - as a rationalization of accumulating worldly goods.

Protestantism injected moral meanings into the work ethic when Luther conceived of work as a way to serve God, indeed as the best way. (Luther's influence continues in Switzerland to this day. In a recent public referendum, the people preferred to remain on a 45 hour week instead of going to 40 hours.) Calvin added to this by considering dislike of work as the road to damnation, because work, is in effect, "God's work" and men of all stations must work unceasingly.

The industrial revolution was fortified by the work ethic with its explicit religious and moral connotations.

People today are not as prepared to tolerate adverse conditions, hard unrewarding work and self-sacrifice for rewards in an after-

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life. This is not an anti-religion view but rather supported by the increased knowledge of the vastness of the universe and the growing skepticism about the immortality of man. Of course, the nuclear age has increased psychic insecurity of most people in modern society (cite Nixon story on the bomb). In addition, the younger generation has raised our consciousness with regard to the impact of the environment on human life and survival. This has led to a growing concern with regard to clean air, clean water, and the prevalence of dangerous chemicals in our food, at the workplace, and in our daily lives. Thus the deferred gratification of pleasure is less acceptable - less rational. Hedonism (Webster), "the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts" is more in vogue. The "now" generation is a self-explanatory slogan. Young and middle-aged alike no longer accept work - as a process of atonement - or even as a self-contained whole goal in life.

B. Less Dedication to Work

In 1973, eight out of every ten American students believed that "it's very important to do any job well." Attitude surveys of youth have revealed consistently that the work ethic is strong and alive, despite the revolution in social values. However, youth's appraisal of the traditional rewards of hard work has certainly changed. In 1967, a 69% majority answered "yes" to the question: "Does hard work always pay off?" By 1975, 75% of American students answered this question "no". This view of the world of work is probably a reflection of attitudes at home and may also be a more realistic insight that many jobs are routine, dull and boring, and do not challenge the talents of the average worker.

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Leaves of absence are growing more common as workers seek a change from the work cycle. Whereas paid sabbaticals are granted by only 16 of 434 companies surveyed by Hay Associates (1977), nine out of ten of these companies offer unpaid leaves. The organizations are responding to employees' demands for a career pause without a break in tenure.

Work is increasingly challenged by the leisure society. Whereas the work week has remained relatively stable over the past three decades (40 hour week enacted in 1938, effective 1940), people are generally more attracted to leisure pursuits. When work and leisure are compared as sources of satisfaction, only one out of five people (21%) state that work means more to them than leisure. The majority (60%) say that while they enjoy their work, it is not their major source of satisfaction. (The remaining 19% are so exhausted by the work demands that they cannot conceive of it as even a minor source of satisfaction.)

A recent unpublished manuscript reveals striking findings in Sweden. When Swedish men, 18 to 55 years of age, were asked in 1955 "What gives your life the most meaning-your family, your work or your leisure?", only 13% said "leisure", 33% stated "work", and 45% answered their "family" gave their life the most meaning.

In 1977 the same question addressed to a new cross section of Swedish men found that work as the main source of meaning in life was cut in half-from 33% to 17%, family life declined a bit-45% to 41%. But leisure more than doubled-from 13% to 27%.

Currently, Sweden is experiencing unusually high absenteeism ranging from 15% to 30%-another manifestation of negative attitudes toward work reinforced by social security pay.

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Yet, this dramatic shift in attitudes is not easy to explain. Nor does it suggest that the new breed of workers is less motivated. It does reflect cynicism, higher expectations and a questioning attitude toward the value of work. It also places a more difficult obstacle in the path of managers. Developing employee commitment to the job and the organization is tough.

Many executives are also seeking a new balance between work and life. Fewer executives take their attache cases home every night to prove that their personal time is free from company work obligations.

C. Participation in Decisions

Over the past ten years there has been a remarkable increase in employee expectations for participation in decisions that affect their job. In 1977, 54% of the public say they feel they have a right to take part in decisions affecting their jobs. (62% younger workers expressed this view.)

Decision making is one of the more subtle, new issues. As the British put it so aptly: "It is climbing up a slippery slope." Educated workers want and believe they deserve more participation. This desire is specific to the immediate arena of the job and work related issues. It does not reach up to executive decisions or corporate wide decisions which extend beyond the individual employee's ken or beyond his limited vision of the organization.

Nevertheless, despite the relatively narrow dimensions of the decision field-the sharing of decisions is resisted by most managers. The issue is joined slowly, if at all. Authority and responsibility tend to rise to the top, not drift down to the bottom. Managers cherish authority and worry about having too much responsibility.

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The former is usually considered too little and the latter too much. Preoccupation with responsibility limits any impulse to delegate or share authority for decisions.

This is the real dilemna. Despite the rather limited horizon of employee decision making demands, the modern organization has been structured in the opposite direction. Further, participation in decision making is an art form and requires a genuine set of motives and a basic belief in the ultimate value of the individual. In other words, management needs to place a higher value upon the individual to see his head as a resource and open up to his ideas-without giving away any authority-it must share some responsibility.

Current demands for participation in decisions that affect one's life are evident in schools, universities, welfare agencies, prisons, hospitals, offices, factories, the military forces and in the church. If these demands succeed they will bring great changes in a wide variety of institutions.

D. Older Workers

We consider the older workers over 50 dedicated to the work ethic. Therefore wondering whether this cynicism was purely a function of age, workers over age 55 were asked whether they felt that they had a sense of achievement and reward looking back over their careers. The majority answered "no" - hard work did not pay off!

Then they were asked, what would you like to change? They replied "nothing." We are past that point in our working careers - it's too late - we would rather retire and leave the battleground to someone younger who may have sufficient years ahead to change the system.

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Retirement data confirms this opinion. The labor force participation rate of men, age 55 to 64, has declined sharply - from 89% in 1947 to 80% in 1977. This withdrawal of men in the prime of their working lives is a remarkable fact. Some are forced out, some are bought out and others want out. Few reenter, especially when retirement income is adequate. One may also note that women are rushing in to seek the jobs the men no longer want. Female participation rates increased from 34% to 47%. Women are also exhibiting "male" symptoms: ulcers, hyper-tension and cardiovascular disease.

E. Comparison with Japan

Japan is considered the model industrial state in terms of its productivity. The work ethic is often contrasted to the United States, which is considered a country with declining work values. According to a recent OECD study (October '76) there are significant changes in attitudes among Japanese workers which reflect a falling off in traditional devotion to work and the enterprise, especially among the young.

Over nearly a forty-year period (from 1930 to 1968), the number of Japanese who concurred with the statement, "Don't think about money or fame; just live a life that suits your own tastes," increased from 11 to 51%. During the same period, those agreeing that it was wise to "Resist all evils in the world and live a pure and just life" dropped from 30% to only 10%.

A survey of workers' attitudes to life indicated that 40% valued work more highly than family life or leisure, but for males under 20 and females under 30, leisure was most highly valued.

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In 1974, 60% of workers surveyed were not satisfied with their wages, and 25% were not happy with their work. Additionally, 40% wanted to change jobs - this in a society which discourages mobility.

Japan teaches us that the changing attitudes of the young are not peculiar to the United States, and that work must compete with other values.

F. The Permissive, Affluent Society

Today's workers are members of the permissive and the affluent society. They have rarely experienced economic hardship. Better educated, with even higher expectations for their careers, they want more, faster. They are impatient for advancement in money and status and expect more openness, more communication and more involvement - as entitlements, not as something to be earned over many years of loyal service. (Cite: Eric's salary offer at $28,000). They have little exposure to the fear of war or depression.

G. Quality of Working Life

Changing attitudes toward work, combined with the revolution in social values, have raised new interest in improving the quality of working life. The expectations and aspirations of workers require a new social agenda. It involves a shift away from authoritarian concepts of management, and substitutes one which places a higher value on individual employees and groups as critical factors in work efficiency.

This new agenda stands in sharp contrast to the dominant contemporary practices of work organization. Many terms have been used to describe the newer concepts, including worker participation, participative management, industrial democracy, autonomous work groups

and work teams, humanization of work, quality of working life, job redesign and job enrichment.

It is increasingly thought that the more useful and lasting changes will be those which embrace the entire environment of work and seek to achieve a systematic restructuring of the process of production per se.

As a comprehensive concept, the quality of working life encompasses such matters as the organization of work (i.e. of the production process itself), hierarchical structures, relations with workmates, the social situation within the firm, the working environment, participation in decision-making at all levels and opportunities for self-development and advancement.

This is not a passing fad. Nor is it a straw man created by the media or the professors. It is a new and genuine agenda for the future. It presents a new language for speaking directly to the expectations of workers in terms which touch their real needs.

Employment policies and operating practices can be accommodated to the rising expectations of employees. Employees desire opportunity, participation, and use of their potential. This is a universal human need. Workers want to learn, to receive training and to develop on the job. They want a more meaningful participation in decisions which affect their work. Such participation can be linked to productive goals; it need not become an undermining of authority or a dilution of management control. Under proper conditions, employee participation increases motivation and builds a commitment to the goals of the enterprise. The social interaction is also important.

Where intense competition, rivalry and secrecy prevail, employees are less likely to cooperate and are prevented from engaging in effective group efforts. (Cite: Exxon Tax Story).

Workers wish to compete for recognition, training, promotion and advancement, especially at the lower levels. This aspiration is compatible with the needs of every organization to utilize and upgrade its own human resources.

IV. Work and the Family

A. Divorce

The rising divorce rate is growing in visibility. Dr. Kenneth Keniston of MIT estimates that two out of five children born in the 1970's will spend some time in a one-parent family. The 1975 statistics reveal that there were one million divorces versus two million new marriages. Many states have responded to the divorce ethic with more liberal laws, including the spread of no-fault divorces. The social stigma and religious taboos against divorce are disappearing in many sectors of the country. Some people are talking about the first marriage as a trial run. Yet the data show that, whereas 35% of first marriages end in divorce, over 50% of second marriages end in divorce, so that divorce is not a step toward stability of the family in the second level experience. Divorced workers have more stress and pressures including alimony, child care, and readjustments to new life style.

B. One-Parent Families

Nine million children under 18 are now being raised in one-parent families. Most of these families are headed by women, and one-third of these children are under age six. The single-parent family has

increased 31%, almost three times the rate of growth in two-parent families. In fact, there are now 2.4 million one-parent families, versus 29 million nuclear families, almost 10% of the total, and it is growing rapidly. Our best estimates show that there are fewer than one million places in child care facilities in the United States, with more than six million children under age six in families with working mothers. The one-parent family and the high divorce rates, and the growth of single-parent households all point to serious problems in child raising, and reveal the conflict between the needs of the family internally, and the needs of the parent to generate income to support the family. In the conventional male-headed breadwinner nuclear family, there was limited competition between the role of the breadwinner and the role of the homemaker. In the single parent family, homemaking is weakened by the demands of full time, full year employment.

C. Multiple Worker Families

(Cite: Harvard psychiatrist and his consultant wife).

During the period 1950-75, families of two or more workers rose from 36% to 47%. Just about half of all the 46 million husband/wife families has a working wife. The economic pressures of inflation, rising taxes and costs of health care and education have exerted the greatest force in pushing women to work. 72% of all working wives work full time, full year and six out of ten wives with children aged 6-17 worked in 1974.

Working wives contributed 38% of median family income of $17,500. Where the husband was the sole breadwinner, the median income was only $14,400. Husband/wife working has become the most obvious

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answer of the American family to pressures of inflation and the rising expectations of the American family.

We also have the new elite of husband/wife professionals: both relatively young with high pay, producing sudden status and income and moving on different career paths.

D. Work Place Implications

The growing involvement of women in the workplace, and the multiple worker family, has a number of implications. First, it clearly points to the growing popularity and need for flexible working hours, including staggered hours, flexitime, and shorter work weeks. Many of these changes can be accommodated by employers without any capital investment, with a minimum effect on present production programs, and with payouts in reduced absenteeism, lower turnover and possbily higher productivity.

It also points to the growing demand for part time jobs for women, younger workers and older workers. We will witness increasing husband/wife career conflicts and maladjustments. Many companies have revised their policies to permit the employment of both husbands and wives without regard to previous restrictions on nepotism, which are hangovers from the depression; and transfers and management development programs must increase in flexibility to recognize the combined needs of both members of the family, whose careers are important to the firm as well as to the family.

There is a very minor degree of experimentation with shared jobs, where husbands and wives with in the same profession share one job, especially at universities.

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Sweden has recognized the impact of husband/wife working by providing seven months' maternity leave, which can be shared by either parent with relatively free choice. This is an experiment worth watching, but it reflects the concern of society with this problem.

There is also growing evidence that women are more immune to business recessions. They are more insulated because they are concentrated in retail trade and service industries, which are less subject to cyclical fluctuations. Only 6% of women work in construction and 20% in durable goods manufacturing - the seasonal and cyclical areas.

V. Conclusions

Changes in Western society have been more rapid and penetrating than have been changes within the workplace. After all, changes in mores, folkways and laws have reflected the revolution in social values. Society's changing attitudes toward legal abortions, youth, divorce, contraception, the use of drugs, women's rights, civil rights for minorities and more casual sexual mores--all these present an imposing and almost unbelievable agenda of sweeping social change.

Of course, the nature and the rapidity of these changes have posed a moral dilemma for many. There are those who long to return to the old values of yesteryear and are puzzled and angry about the social revolution. We witness this daily in the public debates on homosexuality, the ERA amendment to the Constitution, civil rights for minorities, pornography, the death penalty, and many other social issues.

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By contrast, conditions have remained relatively static in the workplace. The large bureaucracies of government, industry, the church, universities and the military all remain relatively resistant to change. Authoritarian rules and customs are deeply embedded and are rather sheltered and secure from the outside environment.

Many large organizations are almost self-contained societies. They are relatively immune to the outside - the external social forces. Sheltered from the winds and torrents of social change, the organization leaders continue to respond best to the muted, cushioned sounds of the cloistered world they work in. Corporate leadership is angry and confused by the external noises and views them as an unwelcome disruption of the relative tranquility of the past and as a constant threat to efficiency.

Nevertheless, the concern for human values must be focused on the workplace. First, because the individual devotes the greater part of his mature lifetime to his occupation. His time, energy and physical and mental resources are engaged in this endeavor. Second, our freedom, growth and standard of life depend upon earned income. Third, the role of breadwinner is fundamental to the family and to self-respect in the society. Fourth, human resources are the only natural resources which are not in scarce supply. Finally, most of all, production, industrial growth and technological advances are not ends in themselves: they are a means to an end--namely, to improve the quality of life for all.

SUMMARY

1. The permissive society has fostered a change in authority roles. The young workers have higher expectations and place intelligent limits upon the exercise of authority over their lives.

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2. The general mistrust toward big business is no longer limited to the public at large. Now it appears to an increasing degree to employees at all levels who are puzzled or critical of the behavior of their own employer.
3. Employees, supervisors and managers all dislike and fear change. As long as the risks and dangers of change outweigh the rewards, employees will suspect and resist change.
4. Changing attitudes toward work reflect the values of a post-religious society which no longer views work as punishment with a reward in the after life.
5. Youth reflect much less commitment to the work ethic and greater cynicism in many areas. Even managers and executives have been searching for a better balance between work goals and life goals. Work is increasingly challenged by the leisure society.
6. Older workers do not look retrospectively upon their careers with a real sense of achievement. Instead of seeking to change the system, they have chosen to seek the escape route of early retirement - or in some cases, retirement on the job.
7. Significant attitude changes in Japan teach us that the American young are not a peculiar breed and that for the first time work must compete with other personal values.
8. The era of rising entitlements has created a feeling that jobs, income and a rising standard of life are no longer privileges, but instead are a secured right.
9. Changing attitudes toward work, combined with the revolution in social values, have opened a new interest in improving the quality of working life as the long term answer to a renewed motivation to work.

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10. Changes in American moral and social values have been rapid and penetrating over the past decade. By contrast large organizations are slow to change. Thus an institutional lag persists. Executive leadership in these vital organizations needs to reduce the lag and bring their organizations into a more harmonious relationship with society and its values.

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